



Sierra

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Group

SEPTEMBER 2020

Trump's Interior Department slashed royalty rates and suspended leases to bail out oil and gas corporations. Billions in COVID-19 relief money flowed to the oil industry. - Antonia Juhasz, Sierra Magazine, August 2020

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 at 7 p.m.

The Latest on Electric Vehicles

with Jeffrey W. Springer, Manager, Innovation and Efficient Electrification, Dairyland Power Cooperative

ONLINE/DIAL-IN (Zoom)

Join us ONLINE on Tuesday, September 29 at 7 p.m. as we welcome Jeff Springer, Manager of Innovation and Efficient Electrification at Dairyland Power Co-op, who will talk to us about the latest on Electric Vehicles (EVs). We'll talk about why we should consider switching to EVs, how we can encourage our local governments to prepare for an EV future, bust some myths, and more.

The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the United States is from burning fossil fuels for transportation. EVs charged by renew-

able energy produce no global warming emissions. Even if they're charged by electricity produced from burning coal, EVs produce fewer emissions than comparable gasoline or diesel cars, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. A new Northwestern University study concludes that, "widespread EV adoption (25-75% adoption) could save the U.S. \$17-70 billion every year," by avoiding damages from climate change and air pollution. Switching to an EV is something many people can do right now that will have a major impact on their pocketbooks and our climate. Many businesses are pledging to transition to all EV fleets.

This will be a ZOOM event so you will be able to attend online OR by phone. Please RSVP at tiny.cc/CRSCEV929 for access information.



With Heavy Hearts

We're writing to you on August 26 with heavy hearts about the senseless act of violence that occurred in our state recently. As you may be aware, Jacob Blake, a Black man, was shot in the back seven times by Kenosha Police Department officers August 23. Mr. Blake's children witnessed the police brutality against their father. This is yet another tragic example of excessive force being used to injure, harm, and kill Black men and women across the United States. The power dynamics we are witnessing are clear.

We have further seen a backlash that is tolerated, if not sanctioned, by police and our officials. Peaceful protesters exercising their first amendment rights are bludgeoned and tear-gassed. Last night, an extremist shot 3 peaceful protesters in Kenosha, killing 2 of them. These dangerous currents in our country increase the need for the Sierra Club to raise the banner of justice.

Sierra Club's Executive Director, Michael Brune, and the Sierra Club Southeast Gateway Group of Wisconsin Co-Chairs, Tom Rutkowski and Laura Buska, denounced this violence with the following statement ...

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Plan to vote

The coming election is probably the most important in our lifetimes when it comes to our environment and climate. Please vote in this election. Please make a plan now to vote. Having a plan to vote EARLY will help ensure your voice is heard.

Voting absentee is easy. In most cases, request an absentee ballot at myvote.wi.gov. Or contact your municipality/city clerk for a ballot application. Absentee ballots will be mailed in late September. When your ballot comes, take care of it RIGHT AWAY.

Read the instructions to ensure you **use the correct pen and ink color** and complete it correctly. If you have questions, contact your clerk. **Get a witness** to watch you **mark, seal, sign, and date your ballot** (the witness is not required to see who you are voting for!) Your **witness should then sign her or his name on the witness line and put her or his full address on the witness address line**. These steps are very important and skipping them will invalidate your ballot.

MAIL YOUR BALLOT RIGHT AWAY. The ballot already has a stamp. **OR**, in most communities, you can **DROP YOUR BALLOT OFF WITH YOUR MUNICIPAL CLERK**. Some communities also have official ballot drop boxes.

TRACK YOUR BALLOT at myvote.wi.gov. This will assure you that the ballot has been received by your clerk. If there are problems, contact your clerk.

Voting absentee will let you take care of this important civic duty easily and securely and let you help others vote, too.

"With so much at stake, we need to fight like hell to get [Joe Biden] elected, along with down-ballot candidates who can push his agenda forward in Congress and statehouses. And then we need to keep pushing him to make his platform promises a reality and encourage him to evolve still further." - Michael Brune, Sierra Club Director

Get a ballot. Vote it. Seal it. Sign it. Date it.
Have one witness sign & fill in her address.
Mail it or use a ballot drop box if available.

The sooner the better.
myvote.wi.gov

Sierra Club Endorsements

The Wisconsin Chapter Sierra Club has announced endorsements for Congress and the State Legislature in the November 3, 2020 election. Previously, the Club endorsed **Joe Biden** for president and **Kamala Harris** for vice president.

"These candidates are committed to protecting Wisconsin families' health, air and water, and to building a clean energy economy that works for Wisconsin," said Elizabeth Ward, Wisconsin Chapter Director.

In addition to U.S. Representative **Ron Kind**, candidates for State Senate, **Brad Pfaff** (32) and

Paul Piotrowski (24) earned endorsements as did State Assembly candidates **Shawn Murphy** (49), **Kriss Marion** (51), **Emily Berge** (68), **John Baldus** (70), **Amanda White Eagle** (92), **Steve Doyle*** (94), and **Jill Billings*** (95).

The Sierra Club is launching the largest voter mobilization in our history to turn out fellow members, supporters, and the public to vote and to work for endorsed candidates. Read the whole endorsement list at tiny.cc/WISC20Endorsements

**Scored a perfect 100% pro-environment voting record and has been named a 2020 Environmental Champion for demonstrated commitment to preserving Wisconsin's environment.*

With Heavy Hearts from page 1

"When we joined our partners in calling for the immediate defunding of the police, we did it specifically to put an end to terrorism against Black and Brown people by law enforcement. Instead of fulfilling their duty to protect and serve the people, all too often, police throughout the country are hurting, terrorizing, and killing Black people without a second thought due to the anti-Blackness that runs deep throughout the U.S."

As a result, we are following the lead of our community partners in sharing the following action steps:

- We demand that the officers involved in Jacob Blake's shooting be immediately arrested and charged. We also continue to demand that Attorney General Daniel Cameron immediately arrest and criminally charge the three officers who murdered Breonna Taylor in her own home on March 13, 2020.
- We ask for donations to be sent to the Milwaukee Freedom Fund which is currently collecting donations to support the many protesters in Kenosha, WI who have been arrested demanding justice for Jacob Blake: <https://bit.ly/3aWTnbN>.
- You can donate to Jacob Blake's Go Fund Me to help cover medical costs as media reports indicate that he is paralyzed from the waist down and is going to need extensive ongoing medical care: <https://gf.me/u/ytqyyx>

As we learn about opportunities to help the loved ones of the victims of last night's shooting, we will share those, as well.

In June, following the tragic murder of George Floyd, the Sierra Club joined racial justice activists' calls across the country to reduce excessive funding for militarized policing and to instead reallocate that funding to invest in initiatives that support the well-being of Black people experiencing social and economic injustice. As September approaches, our nation must come to grips with yet another senseless shooting. It must stop - now.

As Sierra Club members, we are not only fighting for clean air and water and halting climate change to ensure a habitable planet, we are fighting for healthy and safe communities for all Americans. As one of the world's leading environmental organizations, it is imperative for us to address police brutality, racism, and systemic oppression.

Simply put, environmental justice is racial justice. Far too often it is Black and Brown communities who suffer the brunt of environmental harms. Environmental injustice is racial injustice.

No American should ever feel threatened by those charged with keeping us safe. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

As Sierra Club members, we are listening to the grief expressed by those most impacted by these tragedies, especially as the world is already grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. When systems are broken and people are suffering, we must re-examine our values and act, and must stand and fight harder for the humanity and dignity of all people.

We hope you'll continue to work together with us to make a future world where this no longer happens.

Sincerely,

Don Ferber and Elizabeth Ward, Wisconsin Chapter Chair and Director

Tom Rutkowski and Laura Buska, Southeast Gateway Group Co-Chairs

Aaron Huber was shot and killed by a 17 year old militia member in Kenosha. Aaron tried to use his skateboard to disable the gunman but was shot in the chest. A GoFundMe for Aaron's partner and stepdaughter has been arranged. Read more at <https://gf.me/u/yuckvi>

Building an Anti-Racist Environmental Movement - Workshops

In response to the national discussion on racism in America, Great Waters Group is hosting this three-part Zoom series. The workshop will begin Thursday, September 24th from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm and continue for three weeks at the same time on October 1st and October 8th. Registrants are asked to commit to all three sessions, if possible. This is an intensive three-week series of 2-hour Anti-Racism workshops that grew, in part, out of last October's "On The Table" discussion on Environmental Justice and Equity. Last fall, in the discussion session, there was clear agreement that the environmental movement cannot continue to be splintered by the same racial divisions that separate Milwaukee into hyper-segregated communities. These workshops are intended to address the problems and give us tools to break patterns and begin systemic change. tiny.cc/AntiRacismWorkshops

Renewables on Public Radio

Listen to local advocates talk about exciting new developments in solarizing the La Crosse area! Former CRSC president Marilyn Pedretti, La Crosse Sustainability Planner Lewis Kuhlman, recent Central High School graduate Lily Herling, and Casey Meehan, Director of Sustainability and Resilience were on Wisconsin Public Radio's Newsmakers program on August 28 discussing renewable energy, going solar, saving energy, and how our current actions can affect the future. Listen online: www.wpr.org/shows/newsmakers-august-28-2020

County passes 100% resolution!



On August 28, La Crosse County joined more than 160 communities around the country in passing a resolution pledging to reduce carbon emissions to zero and transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050. Thanks to all those who signed our petition and contacted

their County Board representatives!

NOW, we want to make sure that next steps are planned to reach those goals! If you live in La Crosse County, please email the board and thank them for passing the resolution AND ask them to let you know what the timeline for accomplishing these goals is and how you can support these efforts! Thank you to La Crosse CRSC members and to our partners, Wisconsin Conservation Voters and Citizen Action Driftless Rural-Urban Co-op.

If your community or county would like to start a READY FOR 100 campaign, there are resources available at www.sierraclub.org/ready-for-100/take-action



Grow Solar La Crosse continues to offer informational "Solar Power Hour" sessions for those who live or own a business in La Crosse county wishing to get more information about "going solar." The educational group buy program provides information and free site assessments and consultation. Those who sign up will get discounted rates on panels and installation and those discounts will increase if more people sign up. The sign up deadline has been extended! For more information, please visit GrowSolarLaCrosse.org.

"The US's electric bill could be halved through energy-efficiency measures and renewables that would mostly pay for themselves in a year. That's not a free lunch. It's a lunch you're paid to eat."
- Amory Lovins, Rocky Mountain Institute

Virtual Volunteer Night!

If you've been thinking about getting more involved, here's your chance! **Join us ON ZOOM on Wednesday, September 9 from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.** to learn about and work on our efforts to get our utilities to retire Wisconsin's coal plants and ensure the Evers Administration does not allow for any new fossil fuel infrastructure. You can also learn and get involved in our educational efforts working to ensure everyone has safe drinking water and access to Wisconsin's public lands. If you just have 2 hours to give to make a difference and can't do more than that, then this is a great place for you as well! You MUST RSVP at the link in order to get access instructions. tiny.cc/SCVolNite0920

Vernon Electric to offer low-interest energy savings loans

Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC) is joining the USDA Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP) which allows electricity providers to offer low-interest long-term loans for customers to weatherize and upgrade energy efficiency on homes and farms and install renewable and efficient systems. Loan payments are added to participants' energy bills and in many cases,

savings from the improvements are greater than loan payments. VEC says it will focus on weatherization and energy efficiency, geothermal, heat pumps, and, when available, battery storage. In addition, VEC has installed a level 3 EV charging station at its Westby headquarters and plans to offer incentives for EV charging stations at member homes and businesses.

My Conservation Experience in the Indiana Dunes

by *Veronica Bauer* Before this past summer, I did not grasp what conservation truly meant. From learning about and discussing it in my classes, I formulated the notion that conservation (i.e. the preservation, protection, or restoration of the natural environment and of wildlife) is nothing more than its definition. However, my experience in the Indiana Dunes wetlands told me otherwise.



From June 10 to August 8, WisCorps provided a great opportunity for me to be on a wetland restoration conservation crew in the Indiana Dunes State and National Park. Four other crew members and I worked alongside the National Park Service, assisting them with restoration. In the first couple days of our service term,

we got a crash course on multiple valuable skills such as native and invasive wetland plant identification, herbicide mixing and application procedures, planting, and seed collection methods.

The main focus of our work was invasive species control which involved using backpack sprayers to directly apply herbicide to wetland invasive species. Our primary target was cattail, but we also sprayed mullein, purple loosestrife, and epilobium. We mostly worked at a Beverly Shores site and at Cowles Bog. In addition, we collected native seeds and planted native wetland species. Our uniform--long sleeve shirts, long pants, goggles, hats, waders, and chemical resistant gloves--worked very well to protect us from herbicide, rice cutgrass, and ticks.

I learned a few important lessons during my conservation journey. The first is wetland native and invasive plant species identification. We learned about various sedge species, swamp milk-



weed, sweet flag, irises, asters, blue cardinal flowers, and native loosestrife, among others.

Second, I learned about patience. I feel like we live in a world where immediate gratification is desired and pursued. However, many solutions to today's world problems are not immediate, they take time to heal. One of the best moments was when I started seeing the results of our hard work. After the exhaustion of the first couple of weeks, seeing the propagated native plants take root and the cattail begin to yellow revived me and reminded me of why I was there in the first place.

My third lesson was that something small can go a long way. I know we have not gotten rid of all of the cattail in Cowles Bog, but I hope to someday return to see a cattail-free bog and be confident that I had a part to play in the bog's restoration.

The last lesson regards mental strength and solidarity. The work is definitely not glamorous and can be physically and emotionally draining. By being mindful of my own body and understanding my limits, I can then be more receptive and empathetic towards others' health and well-being.

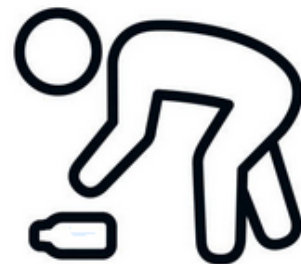
After my time on the conservation crew, my new perspective on conservation has a bit more to it. Conservation not only benefits the natural environment and wildlife; it also extends to surrounding communities.

For example, invasive species reduce the biodiversity and resilience of an area. If nothing had been done to stop the quick spread of cattail in Cowles Bog, it would dominate the area and leave little or no space for other plant, insect, or animal species. Without biodiversity, local and eventually, global, ecosystems could collapse. Everything comes
(Continued on page 6.)



Highway Clean-up, September 18-20

COVID-19 restrictions have kept us from cleaning up trash on our adopted River Valley Drive this year. **National Clean Up the World days are September 18-20**, so we'd like to do coordinated **individual family group clean-up outings** during that time. If you can help by cleaning up a portion of River Valley Drive between Palace Street and St. James Street any time between September 18 and September 20, please **contact Pat Wilson to be assigned a section of the road**. You can use your own trash bags or arrange to get bags and safety vests from Pat. You can take the trash bags home for disposal or leave them along the road where we'll arrange for the city to pick them up. For a map of the area, visit tiny.cc/RvrVlyDr-LaX and to sign up for a section, contact Pat at 608-788-8831 or email him at pbwilson@centurytel.net.



Take a picture of your most interesting find, most beautiful clean-up companion, or most stunning clean-up view and email it to crsierraclub@gmail.com. We'll include some of your pics in our October newsletter AND we'll choose one participant at random to receive a highway clean-up prize!

Virtual Bike Fest Sept. 4 - Oct. 4



This fall, the all-virtual La Crosse Area Bike Fest will provide everything you need to enjoy free, self-supported, self-paced bike rides through the Driftless area on your schedule and at your preferred pace. With online maps, free routes, cue sheets, and turn-by-turn directions

through your smartphone or GPS device for registered participants, you can follow along individually or with a safely-distanced group, anytime in the month of September.

Official routes include family-friendly rides around La Crosse, mountain bike and gravel trails, and longer road routes that wind through Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin. Participants can post photos from their rides for the chance to win Bike Fest swag.

Register for the rides, routes, and giveaways at www.bicycle-lacrosse.com/bike-fest/

September 1: CAFO Dialogue

On **September 1 at 6 p.m.**, the **Crawford County CAFO Study Committee** will host an **online community dialogue** to bring together diverse community members, to hear about community members' experiences and values, and to create a learning environment to illuminate the complexities of farming, water quality, health, and wellbeing in Crawford County. The event will be facilitated by UW-Extension Crawford County Community Development Educator, Jessica Jane Spayde.

Register at tiny.cc/CrawfordCAFO9120 for access information. All members of the Crawford County community are welcome. People from outside Crawford County are welcome to attend and listen, but the primary goal is to hear from community members

For more information, call the Crawford County Extension Office with any questions: 608-326-0223 or email Spayde@wisc.edu.

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full circle, so in order to help ourselves we should also help our planet, and one way to do that is through conservation and restoration.

WisCorps in La Crosse, Wisconsin is an amazing organization all about conservation and education. Their team is full of very passionate people who would love to help anyone wanting to become more involved in their community. To learn more, visit wiscorps.org.

Spread the word!



Photos taken by Veronica Bauer at the Indiana Dunes National Park (www.indianadunes.com) during summer 2020.